

Somerville Tapped For Main Street New Jersey Initiative

Thursday, January 03, 2008

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Star-Ledger

SOMERVILLE -- Somerville has been named one of six towns in the state to officially join Main Street New Jersey -- a state Department of Community Affairs initiative that helps municipalities revitalize their downtowns.

The borough scored the second-highest among the nine towns that applied for the program this year, landing it -- along with Newton in Sussex County -- the traditional label that is given to towns that already have full staffing to oversee revitalization efforts and can begin immediately.

The program offers the towns professional expertise to help boost their economy, spruce up storefronts and market their revived downtowns.

The other towns chosen this year -- Caldwell, Montclair and Orange in Essex County, and Maple Shade in Burlington County -- garnered the Partnership designation, which means the municipalities will focus initially on organization and development, and will be subject to review after the first year.

Beach Haven, Roselle and Sea Isle City also vied for the Main Street New Jersey designation this year.

"We were very excited about the program when the community met back in October and we worked really hard to pull together the application," said Cynthia Hollod, who, as the executive director of the borough's District Management Corp., will oversee the Main Street New Jersey efforts in Somerville. "We were honored that we had the second-highest ranked application of those that submitted applications."

The borough is in the middle of a wide-scale redevelopment campaign, including efforts to revitalize the now-defunct Landmark Shopping Center in downtown Somerville, the Eastern Central Business District on the east end of town, and the borough's former landfill.

Main Street New Jersey operates on four principles: organization, which establishes a core group to lead revitalization efforts; economic restructuring, which helps devise long-term economic solutions for downtowns; design, which brainstorms on how to make downtowns aesthetically pleasing; and promotion, which generates ways to market the Main Streets.

Westfield, South Orange and Boonton are some of the other towns that have worked with Main Street New Jersey since its inception in 1990. According to the DCA's Office of Smart Growth, there have been about 1,370 new businesses, 3,653 building improvement projects, 8,854 new jobs and \$609 million of private reinvestments in the program's 17 years.

Under the Main Street New Jersey program, no money is swapped. That means Main Street New Jersey will not give the towns any grants and in return, the municipalities won't have to pay the statewide initiative for its services and technical assistance.

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